

The Sheridan Road Mystery

By Paul and Mabel Thorne
ILLUSTRATED BY WILL B. JOHNSTONE

BIG NEWS.
MARSH was rather amused at Hunt's neglect to ask him for his address. Right after leaving the Merton office, however, he engaged desk room in an office building so that he would have a downtown address to give.

He was surprised at lunch to find among the young waitresses a Government operative who at once recognized him. In the time-honored custom of the Secret Service, neither told the other what case she and he were working on, but the "waitress," in a guarded voice as she brought his order, said:

"About this time yesterday I had four men at this table and caught snatches of their conversation. I put the facts together about like this: There is a house in a suburb where a counterfeiting plant has been in operation. In some way the attention of the police has been attracted, and the whole outfit is to be cleaned out as soon as the counterfeiters think they safely can get away. I have no idea regarding the location, but if you are looking anything up, this may be a hint for you."

"Thanks, Miss Allen. It is a hint," in fact the girl had given him a clue, which, like the cuff button, might tie up at any moment with some other developments. Moreover, he now knew that his men were planning to get away and that something must be done in a hurry.

After finishing his luncheon he wrote his newly acquired downtown address on a slip of paper and slipped it to her. Marsh then started out on his search for information regarding Merton.

Inquiry at the broker's club failed to reveal anything indicating a connection with counterfeiters, and unless some such connection were established it would be hard to believe that Merton had been the Sheridan Road victim. Yet the coincidences of this disappearance, the evidence of a crime and the cuff button intimated "M" possessed too strong a significance to be entirely disregarded.

If he could not, at this time, establish a connection, then at least, Marsh told himself, he would try to ascertain the nature of the bait held out to take this man of quiet habits to the North Side at 2 o'clock in the morning.

On reaching the hotel where Merton had lived he found that it was still too early to interview the people he wished to see, so he sat down in the lobby. Soon his eyes rested casually on a man sitting opposite and suddenly it dawned on him that the fellow had been watching him all day. He remembered now seeing him at the building where he rented desk room, and again at the restaurant where he lunched.

Soon Morgan came up and Marsh quietly pointed out the man.

"As long as I sit here he'll probably stick," Marsh said. "That gives you a chance to slip out and get one of your men to watch him."

Morgan furtively glanced at the stranger.

"I know who he is," he declared. "That fellow has been wanted a year for a confidence game. I'll have him arrested in ten minutes."

With that, Morgan went out, but while he was gone, the stranger suddenly left with another man. Marsh thought the other was one of Morgan's men, and both were surprised when Morgan and a detective returned.

"Good night!" exclaimed Morgan. "Somebody must have tipped him off." Then, as he recovered from his chagrin, he announced:

"I'm looking into this Merton case." "So am I," said Marsh. "You? That's funny. What for?" "Because," Marsh declared, "I strongly suspect he's the murdered man in our Sheridan Road case!"

Morgan gasped.

WHO'S WHO IN THE STORY.

GORDON MARSH, a Government Secret Service man, on the trail of a counterfeiter, Clark Atwood, rents an apartment in a building on Sheridan Road, Chicago, in which he has discovered that

JANE ATWOOD, the counterfeiter's daughter, lives. Jane, a young and pretty girl, is apparently the innocent tool of her father in passing spurious money.

DAVID MORGAN, detective sergeant, is assigned to investigate a shot fired in the apartment just above that of Marsh and across the hall from the Atwoods, which is rented by a man named Ames and his wife, who are in London. Marsh believes there is some connection between the shot and the Atwood gang and he and Morgan work together. Evidence that a crime had been committed in connection with the shot is lacking—no body was found. But Marsh believes that some one was killed or wounded, and when the papers announce that

RICHARD TOWNSEND MERTON, a wealthy broker, is missing, immediately accepts the news as a clue. Posing as a private investigator, he induces Merton's chauffeur.

GILBERT HUNT, to employ him in an ostensible search for Merton. Hunt tells him that Merton's son, an invalid, and his wife are in Arizona, that he has charge of the business, and if Merton were dead he would be executor of his estate.

Clues in the case—a clut of blood on the floor of the Ames apartment; a cuff button with the initial "M"; a flattened bullet; a letter from Atwood to his daughter, saying he was about to commit suicide.

"HE WAS SURPRISED AT LUNCH TO FIND AMONG THE YOUNG WOMEN WAITERS A GOVERNMENT OPERATIVE WHO RECOGNIZED HIM."



THE two men, together then, went up to search Merton's room in the hotel. For the most part, it was unremarkable, but the desk was disordered.

"That means Merton was very careless," said Marsh. "For else we are not the first people to search the desk."

Letters and papers revealed nothing of interest, but finally in one corner of the desk Morgan picked up a sheet containing some notations regarding bond purchases. Beneath this he found a black, leather-covered notebook of a size that would conveniently fit into a vest pocket. One glance into this and Morgan gave an exclamation.

"See here!" he cried, calling Marsh's attention to the book. "This notebook has been kept in cipher. These combinations of letters and figures mean absolutely nothing as they stand."

The two men slowly turned the pages, but as Morgan had stated, the matter which the book contained conveyed nothing to them.

"That looks as if Merton had some-

thing to conceal, Marsh."

"On the face of it—yes," returned Marsh. "But just glance at this sheet which covered the notebook. From its subject matter I should be inclined to believe that it represented Merton's handwriting."

Morgan nodded and Marsh went on. "Now, when you come to look at this notebook, even a hasty glance shows a difference in the handwriting. In fact, now that my attention has been drawn to it, there is really a marked difference."

"Well?" queried Morgan. "Offhand," returned Marsh, "I would say that somebody has been keeping a secret record. That person, at this desk making additional notes. In a moment of forgetfulness, or perhaps the necessity of hasty concealment, the notebook was placed under this sheet and later overlooked. There is a possibility that this notebook was left by the person who preceded us at this desk."

At this moment, both men became slipping a key into the lock of the door. Marsh quickly dropped the

notebook into the side pocket of his coat. A moment later the door swung open and Gilbert Hunt entered. He stopped with a start of surprise, but quickly recovered himself.

"You gave me a shock!" he exclaimed. "I didn't expect to find anyone here. Already on the job, Mr. Marsh?"

"Yes," returned Marsh, easily. "I never lose any time, and this room naturally should be looked over."

"And this gentleman with you?" questioned Hunt.

"Detective Sergeant Morgan—Mr. Hunt," introduced Marsh.

"I thought I would come up and look things over," explained Hunt. He strolled over to the desk and ran his fingers through the papers. The two men watched him with keen attention.

"Seems to be nothing here outside of personal correspondence," said Hunt, turning around.

"Yes," Morgan answered. "As far as I can see, there is nothing there that would help us."

"And what have you found, Mr. Marsh?" inquired Hunt.

"Nothing that gives me a lead so far. I will report to you as soon as anything comes to light."

"Better come to my home some evening," Hunt suggested. "We can talk in greater privacy than at the office."

"All right," said Marsh. After exchanging a few commonplace words with Hunt, the two detectives went out, leaving Hunt in the lobby. Marsh said, "I strongly suspect that Hunt wanted to be left alone in that room. By the way, I want to have a talk with you. Suppose I come to your apartment to-night?"

"Time?" agreed Morgan. "And here is a suggestion, Morgan. When either of us calls on the other, the signal will be three knocks on the door instead of pushing the electric bell. I have a suspicion that answering a bell these days will have to be conducted with caution."

"Perhaps you are right," said Morgan. "I'll remember."

When the night telephone operator at the hotel came on duty, Marsh asked her if she knew Merton. She said she did, and that he was a very nice man. Showing her his letter of authority from Hunt, Marsh explained his purpose in asking questions.

By impressing upon her the importance of telling him all she knew, the detective induced the girl to reveal some facts of great interest to Marsh.

These were that at 12 o'clock on the night of the strange shot in the Sheridan Road apartment, Mr. Merton had had a telephone call. Contrary, she said, to her usual custom, she had "checked in."

"It was a man who said his name was Nolan," she said. "From what I heard I think he used to be a chauffeur for Mr. Merton. He said he was in an awful hole, that he was unjustly accused of theft, and that they were about to lock him up. He asked Mr. Merton if he could do anything to keep him out of the courts. That person said he would try and asked where he was. Nolan said he was being detained in the apartment of a man named Ames, at some place on Sheridan Road—I forget the exact number."

"Did Mr. Merton go there then, do you know?"

"I couldn't tell you that, he simply said, 'All right,' and hung up the receiver."

"You have given me just the information I needed," said Marsh. "Your job is in no danger if you let this matter rest at that point. If anyone else should question you, you don't know anything. And above all, forget about me. You get the idea?"

"You bet!" replied the girl, as she turned again to her switchboard. Marsh left the hotel well satisfied with his progress. He now fairly well established that Richard Townsend Merton was the victim of Clark Atwood.

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POLISH LINE SEEKS REBATE.

WASHINGTON, Aug. 14.—Count Albin von Niesychowski, President of the Polish-American Navigation Corporation, is in Washington trying to get an adjustment in connection with five cargo steamers that the corporation paid \$2,250,000 on before the bottom fell out of the ship market.

As there are about 40,000 Polish-American stockholders in the Count's company, many of whom have invested their life savings in it, officials are inclined to be sympathetic.

These five vessels were purchased from the Shipping Board when prices were high. Count von Niesychowski believes they are not worth more than \$1,000,000 at present prices, and he is trying to get them for some such figure at a rebate.

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